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ABSTRACT

A new dimension may be added to the study and teaching of a second language by the development of contrastive sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is defined here as the study of how a person relates to another person in terms of language, and is concerned with relational utterances rather than factual statements. Relational utterances are those that assume the existence of a listener, to whom the speaker is relating himself. Such utterances vary in tone and style, depending on the variables of sex, age, status, and familiarity. These variables make it socially, not linguistically, obligatory for certain relational utterances to be selected over others. The necessity of teaching the differences in relational utterances is illustrated in the case of the Japanese, who cannot confortably use English imperatives or invectives because of the social restraint on such usage in Japanese. In addition to the contrastive difficulties between languages, factual statements and relational utterances vary grammatically within one language. Learning one type of utterance does not guarantee knowledge of the other; both must be taught if the student is to be able to generate both. (LG)

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TOWARDS CONTRASTIVE SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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Sociolinguistics is a young field and even its definition is not yet clearly established. To linguists it means secular linguistics (cf. Labov, 1970); to sociologists it is the sociology of language (cf. Fishman, 1968); to psycholinguists it means social psycholinguistics (cf. Miller and McNeill, 1969); to anthropologists it is the ethnography of speaking (Hymes, 1962). Thus, it may be premature to talk about contrastive sociolinguistics. However, I propose to discuss it by defining sociolinguistics narrowly as the study of how a person relates himself to another person in terms of language. The purpose is to show that a new dimension may be added to the study of language and to the teaching of a second language.

Let me paraphrase the definition of sociolinguistics that I have just given so that my presentation can be meaningful. When a person makes statements such as "The sun rises in the east," and "A dog is an animal," or when he cites the Pythagorean theorem, if I may borrow the example used by Professor Fillmore at this conference, this person is not particularly attempting to relate himself to any other person. As a matter of fact, he can utter these descriptive sentences without anyone listening to him. Most statements made in essays and academic writings belong to this category. For the sake of convenience, I shall call such statements factual statements.

In contrast with factual statements, consider the nature of such utterances as "Good morning," "Come here," "See you again," and "Thank you." These utterances assume that there is a listener and the speaker is relating himself to the listener. Thus, these statements may be called relational utterances.

The linguistic structures of factual statements have been contrasted between different languages by contrastive linguists. The result has been a contribution to our knowledge of language and to the teaching of a second language. Now new kinds of contrastive linguistics are suggested. A contrastive, semantic analysis of deictic statements was suggested by Professor Fillmore (1971) at this conference. I

wish to point out that a contrastive analysis of relational utterances is as interesting as the other analyses.

Unlike factual statements, relational utterances have rarely been contrasted systematically between languages. One reason is that the study of relational utterances involves not only linguistics but also sociology and psychology. Sociolinguists and psycholinguists have begun analyzing the social-psychological aspects and correlates of relational utterances, and they are coming up with interesting results, indicating that contrastive sociolinguistics can be an exciting endeavor.

In many language classes, especially in conversation classes, certain selected relational utterances are taught as idiomatic expressions. Those books (e.g., Brooks, 1964) that emphasize the teaching of culture through a language class treat such categories of relational utterances as greeting and requesting on a par with such cultural topics as holidays, meals, and sports. And only a few categories are considered at that. As a result, in general, students are more at ease in making factual statements than relational utterances.

The teaching of relational utterances can be complicated, because they vary in a different way from factual statements. For example, consider how a person makes a choice among the following three factual statements:

"There is a book on the table."
"A book is on the table."
"I see a book on the table."

If males or people of high social status were found to prefer the statement "A book is on the table" to "There is a book on the table," much more frequently than females or people of low social status, factual statements, too, would require a sociolinguistic analysis. As it is, to many the difference between these statements is simply an individual, stylistic matter.

However, when a person has to make a choice among such relational utterances as:

"Come here."
"Please come here."
"You will come here."
"You are to come here."
"I want you to come here."

"Will you come here?"
"Won't you come here?"
"Would you come here?"
"Could you come here?"
"Why don't you come here?"
"I wish you would come here."

his decision will be more social-psychological than purely linguistic. The usual social-psychological variables are: sex, age, status and familiarity. There may be more. These variables about the speaker and the hearer make it not linguistically but socially obligatory that a certain particular relational utterance be selected over others. In this sense, the study of relational utterances is sociolinguistic.

The following is a list of topical categories of relational utterances. The list is by no means complete and the order of the categories does not imply any kind of priority.

Topical Categories of Relational Statements

greeting
introducing
getting acquainted
getting accepted
addressing
departing

questioning
requesting
commanding

giving
receiving
thanking

praising
flattering
sympathizing
loving

scolding
insulting
threatening
cursing

interrupting
excusing
apologizing

discussing
arguing
quarreling
persuading
lying
boasting

reinforcing
rejecting

teasing
joking

Some of the topics have already been studied. Classic examples are the studies by Brown and Ford (1961) and Slobin, Miller, and Porter (1968) on the forms of address in American English and the study by Brown and Gilman (1960) on what they called the pronouns of power and solidarity in several European languages. These studies are of special interest to those Asian students who are not familiar with how pronouns and first names are used in Western countries. The more familiar students become with the variables involved in relational utterances, it is assumed, the more understanding human relations they can establish.

Another interesting study was done by Coser (1960) on who makes jokes about whom or what for what reason. According to this study, which was conducted in this country, a person makes fun of himself and solicits a laugh from the people by whom he wants to be accepted as one of them. The study also showed that there is a definite pecking order in joking relations. Senior people make more jokes than junior people and they make more jokes about junior people than vice versa. Even in this country the role of females in joking relations is that of laughing at jokes made by males rather than making jokes themselves.

Regarding the category of commanding, the social-psychological variables, i.e., sex, age, and status, are not as important in English as in languages like Japanese. Perhaps the most ubiquitous advertisement in America, if not in the world, is the one put up by a soft-drink producer. It says, "Drink Coca Cola!" Americans are commanded to drink Coca Cola! It is no wonder that the consumption of this particular beverage is so high. To be serious, it is interesting to note that American customers, who are supposed to be always right and supposed to be kings, do not mind being commanded in this way by commercial firms whose pet phrase is "Buy now, pay later." Such a free use of imperative forms is not socially possible in Japan.

My survey (Higa, 1970) of advertisements in randomly selected Japanese and American newspapers and magazines showed that 62 percent of the American advertisements used direct imperative forms and 38 percent used declarative forms, whereas only 30 percent of the Japanese advertisements used various indirect forms of request and 70 percent used declarative forms.

I have also noted that Japanese females, both adults and children, use imperative forms much less frequently than

males. This often results in an excessive use of the word please and in a heavy preference for the indicative and subjunctive moods over the imperative mood by Japanese women when they speak English.

Many Japanese students studying in this country complain that they are unable to release their aggressive or frustrated feelings verbally, because they do not know how to be invective in English. A few weeks ago, a colleague of mine showed me a news item (English-Speaking Union, 1970) that said that Sony Corporation, a Japanese producer of not only transistor radios but also language-teaching materials, was recruiting Japanese who could "invect" and curse in English. My bet is that Sony was not successful in this attempt.

For better or for worse, English seems to be richer in invective vocabulary than Japanese. The worst invective one can say in Japanese seems to be "Fool!" When Prime Minister Yoshida used this word in his moment of anger in addressing an annoying representative in the legislature about fifteen years ago, his government collapsed and a new national election had to be held. According to the studies of invectives by Labov (1969) in this country and by Hoshino (1971) in Japan, social-psychological variables are definitely operating in their use.

I can cite more examples but these are sufficient to indicate that contrastive sociolinguistics is a promising area. But this area is not likely to receive linguists' attention. When they talk about "unacceptable sentences," they are talking about sentences which are grammatical but difficult to comprehend due to certain psychological limitations such as memory capacity (Chomsky, 1965). Sentences with two or more embeddings are some examples of "unacceptable sentences." Linguists are not interested in studying socially acceptable sentences. However, language teachers need to know a grammar of socially acceptable sentences.

Although relational utterances are rarely used for linguistic analyses, they seem to have their own grammar. One of the characteristics of relational utterances is that they are often not "well formed" in the sense that they are elliptic. In other words, they are often telegraphic like "Coming?" or "Nice meeting you." What is interesting about such telegraphic sentences from the sociolinguistic point of view is that the amount of deletion seems to be a function

of the degree of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer. Deletion seems to be an index of familiarity and, therefore, informality.

Another interesting characteristic of relational utterances is that they are often "idiomatic." The following expressions are good examples: How are you? Take it easy. All right. In the case of factual statements translation of one language into another is possible if one has the knowledge of their grammar and vocabulary. But many relational utterances cannot be translated as easily as the Pythagorean theorem. This is the reason why we have conversation classes where students often learn and rote-memorize relational utterances as idiomatic expressions. Their knowledge of grammar does not enable them to create an infinite number of relational utterances. For that purpose they need to know, in addition to the grammar, the factors that go into making relational utterances of various categories. For example, by knowing the factors of English invectives or flatteries in addition to the English grammar, one should be able to utter numerous and novel invective or flattering statements in English. Contrastive-sociolinguistic studies can determine how universal or culture-specific these factors of relational utterances are that are found in one language.

The foregoing discussion has been to suggest that contrastive sociolinguistics is now possible and that sociolinguistic knowledge is as important as grammatical knowledge in making an infinite number of novel sentences and in communicating with other human beings.

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